

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) An instrument for distracting an intervertebral space, the instrument comprising:

a plying device having an actuation handle, an intermediate portion and a first longitudinal axis extending through a center of said actuation handle toward said intermediate portion, said plying device further having a distraction end extending outwardly from said intermediate portion, wherein said distraction end includes - two opposing fork-shaped extensions extending from said intermediate portion of said plying device, each of said fork-shaped extensions including a base, two tines extending outwardly from said base, and a second longitudinal axis parallel to said two tines and centered between said two tines, wherein said second longitudinal axis is off-set from said first longitudinal axis, said fork-shaped extensions, each including an interior side, said interior sides facing each other and, comprising a contour adapted to releasably grasp therebetween an artificial intervertebral disc, wherein actuation of said plying device causes said two opposing fork-shaped extensions to move between an open position and a closed position, said opposing fork-shaped extensions are in parallel planes in said open and closed positions.

Claim 2 (cancelled)

3. (currently amended) The instrument according to claim 1, said fork-shaped extensions further comprising an elongated section, a base oriented substantially perpendicular to the base.

4. (original) The instrument according to claim 3 wherein one of said tines is longitudinally aligned with the elongated section.

5. (currently amended) The instrument according to claim 3 the base of the ~~U-shaped member~~ fork-shaped extensions further comprising a vertebral body stop.

6. (original) The instrument according to claim 5 said vertebral body stop comprising a forward ridge surface oriented perpendicular to the tines' outwardly facing surfaces.

7. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said interior side comprising a notch formed therein for accommodating a vertebral body stop of a disc manipulation instrument.

8. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said interior side comprising a curved profile.

9. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said fork-shaped extensions having exterior sides, said exterior sides comprising vertebral endplate contacting surfaces which, in response to pressure applied to said plying device, distract said intervertebral space.

10. (original) The instrument according to claim 1, said interior sides comprising at least one curved facing profile defining an opening dimensioned to permit an intervertebral disc having at least one exterior curved contour to be positioned between the fork-shaped extensions.

11. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein said plying device comprising a plying device having at least two hinges.

12. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1 wherein said fork-shaped extensions are releasably detachable from said intermediate portion of said plying device.

Claims 13-15 (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) A system comprising:

an instrument including an actuation handle having a proximal end, a distal end, and a longitudinal axis extending therethrough, said instrument further including opposing fork-shaped extensions extending from said proximal end to said distal end of said actuation handle, said fork-shaped extensions having interior sides facing each other, the interior sides forming a passage dimensioned to accommodate the passage of an artificial intervertebral disc each of said fork-shaped extensions further including a base, two tines extending outwardly from said base, and a second longitudinal axis centered between said two tines, wherein said second longitudinal axis is off-set and parallel to said first longitudinal axis;

at least one artificial intervertebral disc having an upper baseplate and a lower baseplate; and

wherein the fork-shaped extensions of said instrument are adapted to engage the upper and lower baseplates of said disc, and wherein actuation of said plying device causes said two opposing fork-shaped extensions to move between an open position and a closed position, said opposing fork-shaped extensions are in parallel planes in said open and closed positions.

17. (previously presented) The system according to claim 16, said baseplates further comprising a centrally disposed dome and teeth disposed apart from said dome, forming a space, and said

tines of said fork-shaped extensions are dimensioned to fit into said spaces for grasping said disc.

18. (new) A plying device for distracting an intervertebral space, the instrument comprising:

an actuation handle;

an intermediate portion;

a first longitudinal axis extending through a center of said actuation handle toward said intermediate portion;

a first fork-shaped extension extending from said intermediate portion of said plying device, said first fork-shaped extension including a first interior side a first base, first and second tines extending outwardly from said base, and a second longitudinal axis parallel to and centered between said first and second tines;

a second fork-shaped extension extending from said intermediate portion of said plying device, said second fork-shaped extension including a second interior side a second base, third and fourth tines extending outwardly from said base, and a third longitudinal axis parallel to and centered between said third and fourth tines,

wherein said first and second interior sides face each other, said first and second fork-shaped extensions define a contour adapted to releasably grasp therebetween an artificial intervertebral disc, and said second and third longitudinal axes are off-set and parallel to said first longitudinal axis.